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In 1964, when I finished high school, we were sad because President Kennedy had been killed, but the country united behind Lyndon Johnson. We thought we would have an economy that would go on forever. We thought we would solve the civil rights problems through the Congress. We thought we would win the cold war without dividing the country. We thought things would be just hunky-dory.

Within a year, people were getting killed at Selma. Within 2 years, we had riots in the street. Within 4 years, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were dead, and Lyndon Johnson couldn't run for reelection, and the country was split right down the middle over the war. And within a few months, we had elected a President on a campaign of "us" against "them," called the Silent Majority. Do you remember that? If you weren't in the Silent Majority you were, by definition, in the loud minority. That's what I was in. [*Laughter*] And we've been "us-ing" and "them-ing" ourselves to death for 30-something years now. [*Laughter*]

And by the way, that's when we had the longest economic expansion in history until this one. And soon after that election, expansion disappeared. And I say that because it is important that you not let the American people, the people of Illinois, the people of Chicago, be casual about this election. Because 35 years ago, when we had the same sort of economy by those terms in those years, we thought it would just go on forever, and we thought everything was going to be hunky-dory, and the wheels ran off.

And I have waited as an American citizen for 35 years to give our people the chance to build one America and to build the future of our dreams. That's what I've been working for these whole 7 years. I knew we could never get it all done in my term of service, but I knew if we could turn America around, if we could point America in the right direction, if we could keep going and unleash the energies of all of our people, we could actually build one country and deal with these big challenges.

Now, that's what this election is about. It is very important. You cannot assume any good thing that is happening today is on automatic. Martin Luther King said, "Progress does not roll along on the wheels of inevitability. It is brought by people who are willing to work hard, to be co-workers with God."

You have to work. You have to work. You've got a Presidential nominee you can be proud of. You've got a Senator, you've got Members of Congress you can be proud of. This is worth fighting for. When people ask you tomorrow why you were here—don't even wait for them to ask—tell them why you came. [*Laughter*] Tell them the country's better off than it was 7 years ago. Tell them we've got better ideas for the future. Tell them you have got the chance of a lifetime to build the future of our dreams for our children, and you are determined to do it, and you know that the best way to do it is to support the Democrats in November.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:10 p.m. at Stefani's Restaurant at a dinner for the Women's Leadership Forum and the Saxophone Club. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Janice D. Schakowsky; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, and Joseph A. Cari, Jr., finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Janice Griffin, national chair, Women's Leadership Forum; dinner hosts Phil and Karen Stefani; Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association, who appeared March 12 on ABC's "This Week"; Veronica and Michael McQueen, mother and stepfather of 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Lincolnwood, Illinois

March 13, 2000

Thank you very much. Mike, I loved that introduction, but it sounds suspiciously like a eulogy, you know? [*Laughter*]

I was in Cleveland today, before I came here, and I reminded the crowd there that the last time I had come to Cleveland was to say goodbye to former Representative Lou Stokes, who was retiring from the Congress. And we went to an elementary school in his district, where there were a lot of young AmeriCorps volunteers, like the ones who

met me in Chicago tonight when I got off the plane. And they were serving in their communities, helping kids. They were teaching all these kids at this school to learn to read and kind of navigate their way in the world.

And I got down—I started with the oldest kids, and I got down to the 6-year-olds, and I'm shaking hands with all these 6-year-old kids. And this little kid looked way up at me, and he said, "Are you really the President?" [*Laughter*] And I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "But you're not dead yet." [*Laughter*] And I realized that for him, Presidents were George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and a part of the job description was you had to be deceased. And when people talk about me the way Mike did, I have to pinch myself and say, "I'm still here." [*Laughter*] But I loved it.

I want to thank Mike and Pat for having us in their beautiful home, and I want to thank them. And Jim, thank you for the work you did on this event tonight. And so many of you have been so good to me and to the Democratic Party. My friend Ed Rendell—I asked him to take this part-time job when he retired as mayor of Philadelphia, and he's wearing himself out at it. And thank you, Senator Durbin, for being here. Yes, he's doing a great job. Give him a hand. [*Applause*] I want to thank Lou Weisbach and Joe Cari for the work they're doing to help our party. And thank you all for coming.

I know we're going to have a little time for questions when I finish, so I'll try to be brief. But I want to say a few things. First of all, I am profoundly grateful to the people of Chicago and the people of Illinois for the support that they have given to me and Hillary and Al and Tipper Gore, starting in December of '91, when I began my campaign here in earnest, through the Democratic primary in '92, through two great elections and all of Illinois' electoral votes. And I am very grateful.

Secondly, I want to thank you, those of you, a large number of you in this room, who have already helped my wife in her quest to join Dick Durbin in the U.S. Senate. I thank you for that.

Thirdly, I want to thank Mike Cherry for all those ties. [*Laughter*] That would be—that's a good reason—if I could run for a third term, I would, just to get 4 more years of ties from Mike Cherry. I was—one wag that works in the White House asked me the other day, he said, "What are you going to do when you're not President anymore and you'll have to start buying your own ties? You'll be bankrupt in no time, you know." He's spoiled me.

The second thing I want to say to you is that what Mike said about the progress that our country has made over the last 7 years is very important to me. But it really only matters insofar as it's evidence of what we can and should do in the future. After all, that's what you hired me to do. And I ran for President because I thought Washington was off on the wrong track, and they were just up there fighting with each other and divided among themselves, and the way people even talked about issues and politics and real life in Washington bore no relationship to what I had tried to do for many years as Governor of my own State.

So I thank you for that. But the important thing is the future. Some of you heard me tell this story, but I used to go out to the State Fair in Arkansas every year on a day I'd have Governor's Day, and I'd just sit there and meet with whoever showed up. In 1990—1989, late '89—I was trying to decide whether to run for a fifth term as Governor in 1990. And this old boy in overalls showed up, about 70 years old, and he said, "Well, Bill, are you going to run again?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. If I do, will you vote for me?" He said, "I guess so, I always have." And I said, "Well, aren't you sick of me after all these years?" And he said, "No, I'm not, but everybody else I know is." [*Laughter*] I said, "But don't you think I've done a good job?" He said, "Well, sure you have, but that's what we pay you to do." He said, "You collect a paycheck every 2 weeks." It was a healthy little reminder that elections are always about tomorrow. That's why we're still around here after over 200 years.

And I have tried to give this country a relentless focus on the future and a way of getting there together. I believe everybody matters; everyone should have a chance. I believe everyone has a responsible role to play. I believe we all do better when we help each

other. Simple ideas, and the country is better off than it was 7 years ago. And for that I'm grateful.

But we've got a lot of work to do this year. We've got a profoundly important vote on whether to approve China's entry to the World Trade Organization and acquire massive access to their markets, which we don't have now. We're trying to raise the minimum wage for workers that are still working 40 hours a week and living on the edge of poverty. We're trying to get tax deductibility to middle class parents for the cost of college tuition.

We're trying to get seniors on Medicare the option of buying prescription drug coverage. When we know three out of five seniors in this country, in spite of all our work, still can't afford the medicine they need. We're trying to get a tax break for people who take care of their elderly or disabled relatives at home, because it's such an expensive but lonely choice, and I think they need our help.

We're trying to modernize our schools by repairing and building thousands of them and making sure they're all hooked up to the Internet and giving all the troubled kids in this country access to after-school programs. We've got a big agenda. And it's very important that we continue to build on the work of the last 7 years in this year, to keep moving, relentlessly forward.

And the last thing I'd like to say about all this is it's also very important that we make the right decisions in this election year. Several of you mentioned today the almost incredible attack that the leader of the NRA leveled on me, saying that I actually wanted a bunch of these kids to die so we'd have a reason to inconvenience gun owners. And you know, I don't want to get into a big personal shouting match about a comment that is clearly ridiculous. What I want you to understand is, there will be a lot of shouting and name-calling and elbowing in this election. There always is. But what I want you to understand is that underneath all that shouting and name-calling, notwithstanding what Mayor Rendell said, I don't think it's necessary to believe that Governor Bush is a bad human being to believe he shouldn't be President. I don't believe it's necessary to believe that the Republicans in the House and Senate are bad people to believe that they shouldn't be in the majority.

And I have to tell you, my experience in politics—I'm not running for anything. I'm just telling you, I've been in this business a long time. Most of the people that I have known in both parties worked harder than they got credit for and were more honest than people believed they were and did the best they could day-in, day-out.

This election is about people who honestly have different views about the way to the future. And what I hope you'll tell people is, it's not like we don't have a test here. We tested their way, and we tested our way. And now you've got a choice, because in the election of 2000, the Vice President says we ought to keep paying down the debt; save enough money to save Social Security and Medicare, so when the baby boomers retire they don't bankrupt their kids and their ability to raise their grandkids; and give the rest of it, after we invest in education and health care, to the taxpayers in a tax cut we can afford.

And Governor Bush says we ought to have one even bigger than the one I vetoed last year, which means we can't guarantee the security of Social Security and Medicare or invest in education, or if we try to, we're going to go back to running big deficits.

Now, we tried it their way, and we tried it our way. And you have to decide whether you think it was better in '91 and '92, or it was better in '99 and 2000. But you don't have to think they're bad people. This is an honest difference of opinion.

We believe that it is not unbearable to ask legitimate hunters and sports people in this country to agree that all handguns ought to have child trigger locks; that the Brady background checks we do at gun shows ought to be done—I mean, at gun stores ought to be done at gun shows and urban flea markets; that since we banned assault weapons, we shouldn't let people get around it by importing these big ammunition clips. And they disagree. It's an honest disagreement. I think we're right and they're wrong.

We've got a 25-year low in crime rate, 30-year low in the gun death rate, half a million felons, fugitives, and stalkers haven't gotten

handguns because we started doing these background checks. And we have to choose.

You know, I believe we ought to provide more health insurance for lower income working people and their kids. I think it would be good for the hospitals, too, that are strapped for money. And we have a proposal on that. I believe we can grow the economy and improve the environment, and so does our Vice President. I think experience matters, and there's no question, even the people that don't agree with anything I've done and don't agree with anything he's done will admit that Al Gore has been the most influential Vice President in the history, that's had the biggest impact over the largest number of issues, in the history of the Republic. Now, that's a fact.

That's not something to debate. And I guess it's self-serving for me to say because the President has to okay that. But I never could figure out why Presidents would want Vice Presidents if they didn't want to put them to work. Never made any sense to me. [*Laughter*] And I could never figure out why anybody would want to be Vice President if they didn't want to get up and go to work every day. And fortunately, I found a fellow workaholic who did a fabulous job.

You know, Dick Durbin—I believe he did the right thing to try to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco. I think he did the right thing—and to protect them from guns. Now, I believe—and I could go on and on and on. So what I want to say to you is, I hope that even though—I think I've done a pretty good job of bringing this country together, not such a good job of bringing Washington together. That may be something beyond human powers. [*Laughter*]

But I hope that we Democrats this year will go out there and run an aggressive campaign, not shy from debates, don't mind a fight, but make it about the American people. You know, voters are not stupid. They know, when politicians are throwing off on each other, they're trying to help themselves; they're not interested in them. But when they're fighting about issues, they can relate to that, because that has to do with how the rest of us live.

And when people ask you why you came tonight, say, "Look, I came because the country's better off than it was 7 years ago. They had some good ideas, and they turned out to be right. I came because I support what we're trying to do this year. And I came because this is a big, big election."

And let me just close with this thought. I have spent a lot of time trying to build what I call one America, to bring people together across racial and ethnic and religious lines, fight against hate crimes and fight for the "Employment Nondiscrimination Act," and to be a force for reconciling conflicts around the world.

And if God came to me tonight and said, "Well, I'm sorry, you can't finish your term. You've got to finish tomorrow. You're history. And I'm no genie, I'm not going to give you three wishes, but I'll give you one," I would wish for America to be one nation, one united country, where people celebrated our differences but revered our common humanity even more, because I don't think we'll be able to do good around the world unless we are good at home.

And that goes to our political differences as well. I had more fun in the State of the Union watching the Republicans and the Democrats when I told them that according to all the research, we were all genetically 99.9 percent the same. [*Laughter*] And I could tell they both were grievously discomfited by that statistic. [*Laughter*] But it's true.

I've now got this—last year one of the great experiences I had was Neil Armstrong came to see me with two of his astronaut partners to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Moon landing. And he brought me this vacuum-packed Moon rock, which I now have on the table right in front of the chairs in the Oval Office. You know when you all see the pictures of the Oval Office on television? There's two chairs and two couches, this big table.

Well, you notice the next time you see it on television, there's this vacuum-packed Moon rock. And when people come in and they talk and they get real angry—like, we had this conference on gun safety the other day, and they got all agitated because I was pushing them to do this bill, and they get angry and mad. I stop everybody, and I say, "Chill out. Look at that rock. You see that

rock? That rock is 3.6 billion years old. We are all just passing through, and we need to do the best we can right now." I want this campaign to be vigorous and hard-fought, but it ought to be a happy time. But you ought to be dead serious about it.

The only other point I want to make is one that's kind of heavy on me now because a week ago yesterday I got to go to Selma and march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge for the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when John Lewis and Hosea Williams and others were beaten badly trying to march to Montgomery to campaign for voting rights.

As a southerner, it was one of the great moments of my life, with John Lewis, who's one of my true heros. But here's what I want to say to you about it. I've been thinking a lot about the sixties lately, because in February we had the longest economic expansion in history. Now, before we broke the record, the record was held by the decade of the sixties, 1961 through 1969. And I see a lot of young people here tonight. I was a high school senior in 1964, in the middle of this vast expansion. And we thought the economy would have high growth, low unemployment, low inflation forever.

And when I graduated from high school, the country was getting over the grief of President Kennedy and honored that President Johnson was trying to pass all the civil rights legislation through Congress. And we thought all of our racial problems would be fixed by laws passed through Congress. And we thought we would win the cold war against communism without having the country divided. That's what we thought was going to happen.

And we were all very—not just the kids, like me, the grownups—we just took it for granted, this is what was going to happen. A year later, Selma occurred. And whites and blacks died in the sixties, just 35 years ago, for the right to vote. A year later, '66, we had riots in the streets. Then in 1968, when I was a senior in college, Robert Kennedy was killed 2 days before I graduated. Martin Luther King was killed 2 months before I graduated. Nine weeks before I graduated, Lyndon Johnson said he couldn't run for President again. The country was split right down the middle over the Vietnam war.

A few weeks later, Mr. Nixon was elected President on a divisive campaign, that he represented the Silent Majority, which meant the rest of us were in the loud minority. And it was a campaign of "us" against "them"—were you an "us" or "them"? And we've been "us-ing" and "them-ing" ever since. And then a few weeks after that, this vaunted economic expansion came to an end, and it was over.

And what I want all of you to say—a lot of you brought your children here tonight. Forget about me being President. As an American citizen, I have waited 35 years for my country to be in a position to build a future of our dreams for our children together—35 years. And I thought about it walking over that bridge and having John Lewis tell me what it was like when he finally realized he was going to get his brains beat out. And I thought about how easily things can change and how easily we can be lulled into a sense of complacency.

I've worked as hard as I could for 7 years to turn this country around. I'm proud of what's happened. But believe me, nothing has happened that can hold a candle to what we could do together now that we have good, basic conditions. What has happened is nothing compared to what we can do.

And that's what I want you to think about. America is always about tomorrow. And those of you who have been blessed enough in this life and this economy to be able to afford to come to this dinner tonight—I'm glad; I like that. But you wouldn't be here, you'd be at somebody else's dinner if you didn't also think that the people that served your food ought to make a decent living and ought to be able to have health care and their kids ought to be able to go to good schools and that we're all going to do better if we go forward together. If you didn't believe that, you'd be at somebody else's dinner tonight.

So I'm telling you, I'm glad you're here. I thank you for helping our party. I thank you, those of you who have helped Hillary, those of you who have helped the Vice President. I thank you for all that. But the fight is still ahead of us. And don't forget this. America is always about tomorrow. And I watched it once before in my lifetime; it can get away from you before you know it. This

is a solemn responsibility we have and an enormous chance. Let's make the most of it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Mike and Pat Cherry, dinner hosts, and Jim Levin, president, JHL Enterprises, dinner cohost; Edward G. Rendell, general chair, and Joseph A. Cari, Jr., finance cochair, Democratic National Committee; Lou Weisbach, chief executive officer, HA–LO Industries, Inc.; Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin, and Michael Collins; civil rights activist Hosea Williams; Gov. George W. Bush of Texas; and Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president, National Rifle Association.

Remarks on Presenting the National Medals of Science and Technology

March 14, 2000

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you and welcome to the White House. Thank you, Secretary Daley, and thank you, Dr. Lane, for your leadership. Secretary Shalala, Dr. Colwell, Representative Nick Smith, Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson, thank you for your support of science and technology in the United States Congress, across party lines. We welcome Sir Christopher Meyer, the British Ambassador to the United States, here to be with us today.

Every year I look forward to this day. I always learn something from the work of the honorees. Some of you I know personally; others, I've read your books. Some of you, I'm still trying to grasp the implications of what it is I'm supposed to understand and don't quite yet. [*Laughter*] But this has been—I must say, one of the great personal joys of being President for me has been the opportunity that I've had to be involved with people who are pushing the frontiers of science and technology and to study subjects that I haven't really thought seriously about since I was in my late teens. And I thank you for that.

When Congress minted America's first coin in 1792, one of the mottos was "Liberty, Parent of Science and Industry." Very few of those coins survived, but the Smithsonian has lent us one today. I actually have one. It's worth $300,000. [*Laughter*] Not enough to turn the head of a 25-year-old .com executive—[*laughter*]—but to a President, it's real money. [*Laughter*] And I thought you might like to see it because it embodies a commitment that was deep in the consciousness of Thomas Jefferson and many of our other Founders. And we could put the same inscription on your medals today.

You have used your freedom to ask and answer some of the greatest questions of our time. Each of you has been a brilliant innovator, and more, breaking down barriers between disciplines, broadening the frontiers of knowledge, bringing the products of pure research into everyday lives of millions of people, helping to educate the next generation of inventors and innovators.

For this, America and, indeed, the entire world is in your debt. It is terribly important that we continue to open the world of science to every American. The entire store of human knowledge is now doubling every 5 years. In just the 8 years since I first presented these medals, think about what has occurred. In 1993 no one's computer had a zip drive or a Pentium chip; there were only 50 sites on the World Wide Web, amazing, January of 1993. Today, there are about 50 million. In 1993 cloning animals was still science fiction. But Dolly the sheep would be born just 4 years later. Since 1993, we've sent robots to rove on Mars, created prototype cars that get 70 to 80 miles a gallon, invented Palm Pilots that put the Internet on our belts and lead to the increasing nightmares of a busy life. [*Laughter*]

The work that you and your colleagues have done has changed everything about our lives. It has brought us to the threshold of a new scientific voyage that promises to change everything all over again.

Perhaps no science today is more compelling than the effort to decipher the human genome, the string of 3 billion letters that make up our genes. In my lifetime, we'll go from knowing almost nothing about how our genes work to enlisting genes in the struggle to prevent and cure illness. This will be the scientific breakthrough of the century, perhaps of all time. We have a profound responsibility to ensure that the life-saving benefits